

The following interview was recorded between Major Greathouse and S/Sgt Arneho on 23 November 1955.

MAJ GREATHOUSE: Would you please state your name, rank, service number, your home station and your duty.

S/Sgt ARNEHO: Alfred Arneho, Staff Sergeant, AF 29044833, stationed at Nellis, working in the control tower.

MAJ G: I'm Major Greathouse from Norton Air Force Base with the Investigating Team concerned with this C-54 accident which occurred on 17 November 1955. Would you tell me your duties on 17 November between approximately 0700 and 1000 that morning?

Sgt A: During the hours of 0700 to 1130 I worked the "A" position, plainly known as the local controller, and I operated the traffic around the airport at that time.

MAJ G: Now the "A" position is the one that makes the radio contacts directly with the aircraft and "B" position handles the ground contacts?

Sgt A: Yes, Sir.

MAJ G: And you were working "A" position all the time?

Sgt A: Yes, Sir.

MAJ G: You were in the tower during all that period?

Sgt A: Yes, Sir.

MAJ G: Would you tell us what you know about this aircraft, Air Force 9068, a C-54. Communications or any operational procedures that were used that morning.

Sgt A: Between the hours of 0730 and 0800 I recall hearing Air Force 9068 first calling Watertown Tower for several times, then attempting to contact the Indian Springs Tower. I did not try to contact the aircraft mainly since I thought I might be cutting out either Watertown or Indian Springs Tower if they were transmitting to the aircraft. I heard AF 9068 transmit on "B" Baker channel, that's VHF 126.18 and apparently said aircraft did not have any contact with either Watertown Tower or Indian Springs and I called the Springs tower and asked them if they heard 9068 calling and the controller at the Indian Springs tower gave me a negative reply.

MAJ G: I see. Now this was just on the "B" Baker channel. You didn't at any time hear them on Channel 3 or any other UHF channels?

SOT A: No, Sir. The aircraft did not transmit on VHF. I definitely heard the aircraft transmit on VEF. It was on 126.18.

MAJ G: There never were any emergency calls like he was in trouble or anything like that?

SOT A: No, Sir. As far as I can recall the pilot had a calm voice in calling the Watertown and Indian Springs towers.

MAJ G: How long have you worked in the tower?

SOT A: I've worked tower for approximately 44 months now.

MAJ G: Could you judge by the sound of the aircraft's transmissions the distance of the aircraft from your tower at the time of those transmissions?

SOT A: No, Sir. The transmissions sounded like he was in the immediate area of Nellis. Maybe it was due to atmospheric conditions but I heard the aircraft loud and clear here at Nellis and we were operating on backup equipment with our 522 set. Our primary VHF channel 126.18 was inoperative at this time, and we were operating on backup. The primary receiver was working, however, the transmitter was inoperative, and I heard the airplane transmit on both the primary equipment and the backup equipment. And his transmissions were loud and clear.

MAJ G: Now, how did you establish this 0730 to 0800 time?

SOT A: Well, Sir, takeoffs here at Nellis usually start at 0700 in the morning and between 0730 and 0800 the main reason I wrote these times down was because I normally have a sheet of paper in front of me and any transmissions I hear I usually write down on a piece of paper. I have the time listed on the piece of paper and the aircraft number. I didn't worry Base Operations about 9068 mainly because I thought this flight was an overhead flight. Unless he stated over the air that he was a cargo aircraft then we have a regulation and certain procedures on how to go about cancelling and flying cargo aircraft. I didn't think that this information on 9068 was too important until Base Operations called the tower asking if we heard 9068 call. Hearing that, I looked on this little slip of scratch paper I had and I saw his number there and I recalled the approximate time I wrote this number on the piece of paper.

MAJ G: Then you believe you heard 9068 call before this message from Operations dispatch indicated he might come in here for an alternate for Watertown.

SOT A: Yes, Sir. I didn't think too much about the fact that this aircraft filed an alternate for Nellis until Operations gave a flight plan to the tower saying that the C-54 filed here as an alternate.

Now on the flight data board there was an aircraft number and type but no ETA. I asked the "B" man and he told me that this aircraft filed Nellis as an alternate and he was overdue to his original destination. At that time I made a blanket call to see if I could obtain contact and at the same time I advised Operations of what I had previously heard over the air.

MAJ G: How you made a call then to 9068 at this time?

SOT A: In the blind, Sir.

MAJ G: In the blind. About what time would this be?

SOT A: This must have been about 0830. Between 0830 and 0900. I told Operations about it -- that I transmitted the blind. I couldn't obtain contact with this aircraft.

MAJ G: Then you did try to call 9068 after 0830 in the blind and you did not receive any answer at that time.

SOT A: Yes, Sir. The time I transmitted in the blind was after being advised from the "B" man who received information from Base Operations that this C-54 filed Nellis as an alternate and Operations asked tower if we had contacted the aircraft and the "B" man asked me if I had contact with them. And I said that at one time I had heard the aircraft but did not transmit and then I tried to transmit in the blind on all channels and received no answer from the aircraft.

MAJ G: I see. Then you called Base Operations back and told them that you couldn't get contact with them. Okay, now your "B" man at this time was Airman Richeson, is that correct? What time did S/Sgt Hillman come back in the tower?

SOT A: As I recall he reported back in the tower from sick call between 0815 and 0900 because he made an entry right after I did and we usually sign the people off when they are going on and off duty. I believe it was between 0815 and 0900.

MAJ G: It would be on your master log there, his coming into the tower, the exact time. Do you log that in by minutes, like 0817, or whatever it might be?

SOT A: Yes, Sir.

MAJ G: We can check on that?

SOT A: Yes, Sir.

MAJ G: How are you familiar with the weather ship that takes off here before the student flying starts? Was there a weather ship went out this morning?

SGT A: Yes, I recall there was a weather ship.

MAJ G: How does he call back in to you and say its Okay to release the aircraft for flying?

SGT A: No, Sir. All this aircraft will report is the weather over the corridor which is the path leading to the ranges and the weather over the ranges. He would then give that to the tower and we would relay the weather to the base weather station. I believe I relayed three pilot weather reports to the weather station that morning.

MAJ G: And that should be on file at the base weather office. Was there anything outstanding that would keep them from flying? Did they fly that morning?

SGT A: Yes, Sir.

MAJ G: How long have you been in the tower operator business?

SGT A: 14 months.

MAJ G: Have you been here most of that time?

SGT A: Going on my second year here now, Sir.

MAJ G: You've been here two years.

SGT A: Approximately.

MAJ G: Are you a qualified limited weather observer.

SGT A: Yes, Sir. I believe I am.

MAJ G: What were your weather observations in the Charleston Mountain area, do you recall.

SGT A: Well, the tower observation here was a lot of cloud buildup over Mount Charleston at the time, over the brown spot located near Sky Haven. Several pilots reported the visibility very poor. This information was relayed to base weather station, and because of this, a few aircraft asked us to make right hand turns on to initial approach to avoid the poor visibility which was about 20 miles east of Mount Charleston.

MAJ G: What ground contacts do you have in the tower. Do you have one with Base Operations?

SGT A: Yes, Sir, we have a direct line to Base Operations and Base Weather.

MAJ G: Do you have one with Flight Service?

SOT A: Yes, Sir. It was just installed about a week ago.

MAJ G: Do you have any channels to CAA?

SOT A: Yes, Sir. We can contact Salt Lake City Control and McCarran Field here.

MAJ G: What radio receiver channels do you have in the tower?

SOT A: We have Baker 126.18, Dog 121.5 and three UHF Channels, one, three and Guard.

MAJ G: Can you receive any of the CAA position report channels?

SOT A: No, Sir.

MAJ G: Have you had a lot of experience with the Nevada Test Site Area with cancelling or controlling aircraft going there?

SOT A: No, Sir, a few times. Once, about a month ago, a C-47 called Nellis tower for cancelling a flight plan and at the same time he filed a flight plan with us prior to landing for his departure.

MAJ G: Do you normally give altimeter settings to aircraft going in that area?

SOT A: Yes, Sir. It is mandatory, I think and we always give an altimeter setting for flights overhead.

MAJ G: Do you have any further points about this accident that we could benefit by?

SOT A: No, Sir.

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